World Without Men

A Comedy

PHILIP JOHNSON

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WORLD WITHOUT MEN

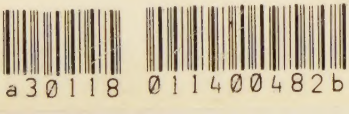
A Fantastical Comedy for Women
in One Act

by

PHILIP JOHNSON

SAMUEL FRENCH

LONDON
NEW YORK TORONTO SYDNEY HOLLYWOOD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MADE AND PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY
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MADE IN ENGLAND

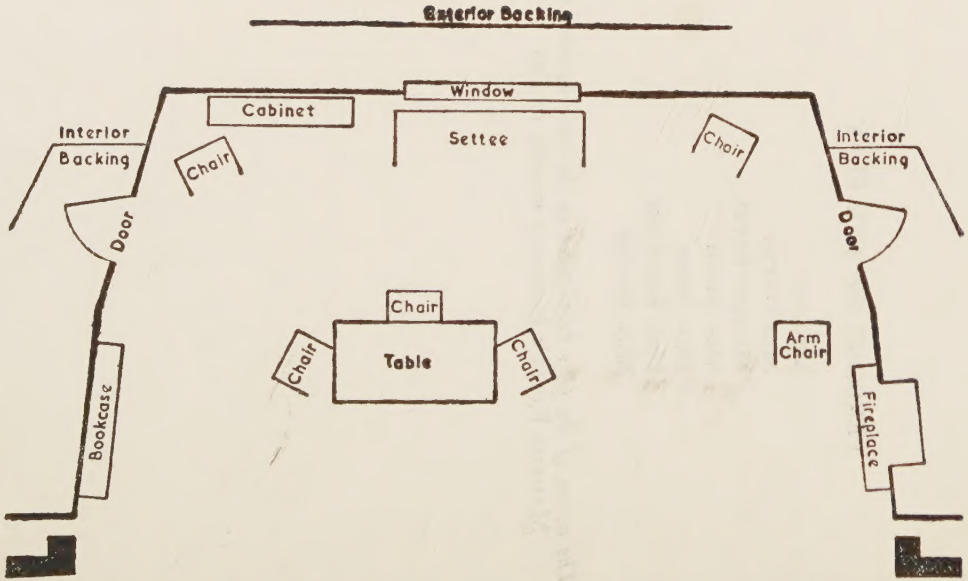
TO

NELTO

PERSONS OF THE PLAY

MILLETT
MISS WISPER
MADAME PAVEL
MRS. SMITH
MRS. JONES
MRS. ROBINSON
MRS. BROWN

The action of the play takes place in the morning-room of MADAME PAVEL'S *house on a morning in July.*


Exterior Backing
Window
Cabinet
Settee
Interior Backing
Interior Backing
Chair
Chair
Door
Door
Chair
Chair
Table
Chair
Arm Chair
Bookcase
Fireplace

WORLD WITHOUT MEN

The morning-room of MADAME PAVEL'S *house is large and lofty, with walls painted a deep cream. The one window,* C. *back, is covered with curtains of thin yellow net, through which can dimly be seen the red-brick façades of the houses on the other side of the street. The fireplace is down* L., *and above this is a door; another door is* C. *of the* R. *wall. The room is furnished well, and with discriminating taste. In the* C. *is a square solid-looking table, upon which are papers, periodicals, apparently of scientific interest, and a telephone; an easy chair is by the fireplace, and several other chairs are disposed about the room. A few paintings, original examples of the modern trend in art, are on the walls.*

See Ground Plan of the Scene.

When the CURTAIN *rises, it is shortly before midday on a morning in July, and the summer sun, streaming through the net curtains, floods the room with golden light. . . . In some remote part of the house an electric bell rings. There is a second or two of silence, then the door up* R. *opens, and* MILLETT, MADAME'S *elderly parlourmaid, enters, crosses to the door* L., *opens it, and goes out. A moment later she reappears, ushering in* MISS WISPER. *The latter, a woman journalist, is young, no more than 23 or 24, pretty, and wearing a smart and serviceable-looking costume. She is clearly a most efficient and business-like young woman, though on this present occasion her manner betrays the fact that she is extremely tired.*

MILLETT (*as she re-enters from the door up* L.). Will you please wait in here, Miss? Madame's out, but she'll be back presently.

MISS WISPER (*crossing and sitting* R. *of table*). Thank you. You don't think she'll be very long, do you?

MILLETT. I'm sure she won't; especially as you say you've an appointment.

MISS WISPER. She rang up the editor of my paper about an hour ago, and asked him if he'd send one of his reporters along.

MILLETT (*staring at her*). Reporter?

MISS WISPER. That's what I am, you know.

MILLETT (*rather blankly*). Oh!

MISS WISPER. You oughtn't to be surprised that there are women reporters, seeing that your mistress is the greatest scientist of the day—even though she does happen to be a woman.

MILLETT (*vaguely*). Oh, yes—course. Ah, well. (*She turns to go, then pauses by the door* R.) I say, miss, what you want to sit there for? Why not try that chair? (*Indicating the easy chair.*)

MISS WISPER. Why? Is there anything wrong with the one I'm on?

MILLETT. Course not; only you look kinda tired, and that chair's more easy-like.

MISS WISPER (*smiling a little*). Thank you, but I'll stay here. I am tired, though: every bone in my body is aching with tiredness. (*Wearily.*) Up all night.

MILLETT (*shaking her head*). Ah, you never ought to do it, that you never ought. Flying in the face of nature, to go turning night into day, with all this dancing and careering about. I mayn't be a Bright Young Thing myself, but I know: I don't read the Sunday newspapers for nothing; 'ectic, that's what it is, 'ectic.

MISS WISPER. Good Lord! I haven't been dancing: I've been working.

MILLETT. Working?

MISS WISPER. Reporting the Duchess of Mainland's midnight charity show.

MILLETT. Oh. . . . Well, it's a pity 'er charity don't bear the light of day.

MISS WISPER. Home at six, a few hours of sleep, then the telephone ringing, and the boss telling me to go and interview Madame Pavel. What a life!

MILLETT. The Boss?

MISS WISPER. My Editor.

MILLETT. Ah, a man. No consideration. I tell you what it is, miss: the world'd be a sight better without 'em.

(MILLETT *turns and goes out* R. MISS WISPER, *left alone, gazes round the room, then yawns, picks up one of the periodicals, glances idly at it and puts it down again. She smiles a little, as though some rather amusing thought has just occurred to her, glances at the door through which* MILLETT *has gone out, and murmurs.*)

MISS WISPER. I wonder. I wonder. A world without men! (*And then, more slowly.*) World without men.

(*She leans back, and closes her eyes, as though the better to visualize an Adamless Eden. The next moment she opens them again and jerks upright, for the door up* L. *has opened again, and* MADAME PAVEL *has entered.* MADAME *is about 40, tall, of commanding appearance, with handsome, clear-cut features, and with a brisk and decisive manner that is slightly reminiscent of the lecture hall. Her dress is entirely concealed beneath a white overall.*)

MADAME (*as she enters*). Ah, good morning, good morning.

MISS WISPER (*who has risen*). Good morning.

MADAME. The *Daily Wire*, I believe?

MISS WISPER. Yes, the editor sent me to——

MADAME. Quite right! Quite right! I told him it was most essential he should send a woman. (*Glancing at her wrist-watch.*) Dear me, I didn't realize it was so late. Would you mind sitting over here while we talk? (*Indicating the chair* L. *of the table; she herself sits at the back of the table, facing the audience.*)

MISS WISPER (*crossing in front of the table and sitting*). Thank you.

MADAME (*picking up a pencil and commencing to tap it on the table*). I wonder if you have the faintest idea as to why I've sent for you, Miss—Miss——

MISS WISPER. Wisper.

MADAME. Miss Wisper.

MISS WISPER. Well . . . I imagine you may have news of some new experiment you're engaged upon to give to the Press.

MADAME. You're quite right: I have. . . . This morning is to see the culmination of the greatest experiment I have ever embarked upon.

MISS WISPER (*impressed*). Indeed. I'm sure my editor will be——

MADAME (*silencing her with a gesture*). You are here, Miss Wisper, not so much to hear me describe it to you, as to be present at the actual manifestation, and to witness it for yourself. It will take place precisely at twelve o'clock.

MISS WISPER (*who can think of nothing else to say*). Oh, yes?

MADAME. You have heard, no doubt, of my previous activities in the Field of Science?

MISS WISPER (*enthusiastically*). Who hasn't?

MADAME. All that I have accomplished will pale into the most feeble insignificance before what is about to be demonstrated before you. (*Pausing, straightening a pile of the papers on the table, then resuming.*) You would not, Miss Wisper, describe the world in its present state as a perfect world?

MISS WISPER (*feelingly*). Indeed I would not!

MADAME. Indeed you would not! Quite so. But it's going to be! It's going to be!

MISS WISPER (*at a loss*). Is it?

MADAME (*nodding her head*). After twelve o'clock today. Think of it! At five to twelve the world will be as muddled and imperfect and impossible as it's been since the beginning of Time; at five past twelve all that will be changed, swept away; the wrinkles and creases in the face of civilization, so to speak, will all have been smoothed away.

MISS WISPER. It—it isn't a new sort of face-lifting you've invented, is it?

MADAME. Do I look like the sort of woman who

would devote her brain and energy to discovering new methods of lifting faces?

MISS WISPER. No, you don't: I must say, you do not.

MADAME (*with a faint smile*). My invention is of rather more significance.

MISS WISPER (*deferentially*). Of course.

MADAME (*after a short pause*). Tell me, what do *you* think of men?

MISS WISPER (*somewhat disconcerted by this*). Men?

MADAME. Yes. Do you—er—like them?

MISS WISPER. Well—really—I don't know. . . . I think I more or less accept them. I mean to say, I'm a business woman and I——

MADAME. I understand. You're not engaged?

MISS WISPER. Oh, no. I really have no time to think of that sort of thing. My profession——

MADAME. Exactly. (*Approvingly.*) You're a sensible young woman, I can see: I'm thankful your editor sent you. (*Rising, walking up* C. *to the window, pausing there for a second with her back to* MISS WISPER, *then wheeling round and facing her.*) Miss Wisper, are you beginning to guess what it is that I'm proposing to do?

MISS WISPER. I—I'm afraid I'm not, though I'm very curious.

MADAME (*dramatically—with a wide gesture*). I'm going to rid the world of men!

MISS WISPER (*staring at her*). You're going to——

MADAME (*continuing*). I'm going to make a clean sweep of them. After twelve o'clock to-day there won't be a single male creature, unborn or living, left upon the earth!

MISS WISPER (*rising—convinced that the most eminent scientist in the world has lost her reason*). But, Madame, you——

MADAME (*taking a step forward—commandingly*). Sit down, girl!

(MISS WISPER *obeys.*)

You think I'm talking nonsense? Is that it?

MISS WISPER (*trembling*). Oh, no, no.

MADAME (*with another step towards* MISS WISPER). But you do! I know exactly what's going on in your mind at this moment: you're thinking "She's mad! She's mad!"

MISS WISPER (*hastily*). Oh, no, no, no, indeed I'm not. How could I?

MADAME. How couldn't you? you mean. I'm not blaming you. It's the first thought that must flash across the mind of anyone to whom I say what I said to you just now, "She's mad!" (*More quietly.*) But I'm not, you know. Oh, no, Miss Wisper, I'm not mad. (*As* MISS WISPER *seems about to speak.*) No, you must listen to me. . . . You agreed just now that the world was imperfect. Has it ever occurred to you to wonder what might lie at the root of this imperfection?

MISS WISPER. Well, of course—there have been times when I've thought there must be something radically wrong somewhere.

MADAME. There is! Men! They're what's wrong with the world! Annihilate them, and at once, half the problems of the Universe will be solved; the remaining half will solve themselves in the ensuing six months. . . . The fact of the matter is, of course, that no civilization in which there is more than one sex can ever be anything by chaotic. False values, inequalities, unrest and discontent are inevitable. Unfortunately, there's no time just now for me to go over the whole argument with you: I can only ask you to accept what I tell you as the greatest of truths. (*With a wide gesture.*) A civilization composed of one sex will flow on untrammelled, unchecked, like a smooth wide river through a grassy plain; a civilization of two sexes will never be more than a mad and seething whirlpool into which humanity is plunged on the day of its birth, to be spun and tossed, bruised and battered. . . . Of course, Miss Wisper, I make no pretensions to originality of thought in this matter—the subject, indeed, forms the basis of the writings of Lu Fu Chu, the Chinese philosopher of the Ming Dynasty—but I do claim to be the first to search for and find a—— (*Breaking off as a ring of the*

door bell is heard off L.) Ah, that will be one of the others, no doubt. I must tell you that four other women, all in sympathy with the—er—cause, have elected to be present in this room at the crucial moment. They are Mrs. Smith, Mrs. Jones, Mrs. Robinson and Mrs. Brown. You may have heard of them.

MISS WISPER. The names sound familiar.

MADAME. Mrs. Smith is the Member of Parliament for West Bromchester; Mrs. Jones, Alma Jones, writes the Perfumed Paragraphs which appear daily in the *Messenger*; Mrs. Robinson is the wife of a prominent business man, and Mrs. Brown—— Ah, Mrs. Smith!

(MRS. SMITH, *ushered in by* MILLETT, *has entered up* L. *She is a grim-looking woman of about 45, dressed in clothes of severe cut, and carrying a walking-stick.*)

MRS. SMITH (*striding into the room*). Morning, Emily!

MADAME. Good morning. This is Miss Wisper, Mrs. Smith.

MISS WISPER (*rising*). How do you do?

MRS. SMITH (*glancing at* MISS WISPER). Ha!

MADAME. Miss Wisper is on the staff of the *Daily Wire*. I thought it advisable to have one representative of the Press present.

MRS. SMITH (*after a prolonged stare at* MISS WISPER). Ha! (*Then, turning to* MADAME.) Well, Emily, the day has dawned at long last. Have you explained to Miss —er——

MADAME. Wisper.

MRS. SMITH. —the full significance of what is about to happen?

MADAME. I was just in the midst of doing so.

MRS. SMITH (*to* MISS WISPER—*rapping her stick on the floor*). We're going to stamp them out! Stamp them out! You realize that, young woman?

MISS WHISPER (*nervously*). Yes—yes—I——

MRS. SMITH. Good! I shall sit down. (*Sitting in the easy chair* L. *by the fireplace.*)

MADAME. Sit down, Miss Wisper.

(MISS WISPER *does so.*)

I'm afraid there's only time to explain very briefly the means by which we're going to——

MRS. SMITH. Stamp them out!

MADAME. Having formed the irrevocable conclusion that only by the annihilation of man could the ideal state be attained, I cast about to discover by what possible means such an end might be achieved. My efforts, embodying years of research, were not unrewarded, since they led me ultimately to the creation of—the Force!

MISS WISPER. Force?

MADAME (*dramatically*). The Force which, released upon the world, will, in the space of a few seconds, sweep from it every living male creature!

MRS. SMITH (*with a sigh of relief*). Ah!

MADAME (*going up to the door* R.). Come here, Miss Wisper.

(MISS WISPER *obediently rises and joins her.*)

Do you know what that is? (*Indicating an electric-light switch let into the wall above the door up* R.)

MISS WISPER. An electric-light switch, isn't it?

MADAME. It is not.

MRS. SMITH (*with a very grim laugh*). It certainly is not!

MADAME. That, Miss Wisper, is the control-switch. At twelve o'clock this morning I shall press it and——

(MADAME *conveys the rest of her sentence by a gesture.*)

MRS. SMITH. Exactly.

MADAME (*glancing again at her watch*). And the hour is drawing very, very near.

MRS. SMITH. I can't think why you want to wait until twelve. Why not do it now, while you're over there?

MADAME. No—at twelve o'clock.

(*The door bell is again heard.*)

(*To* MISS WISPER.) Well, what do you think of it?

MISS WISPER (*going to the back of the table and sitting down—in a dazed manner*). Think? I—I hardly seem able to think at all.

MADAME. You're stunned, of course. That is only natural. Presently you will—— Ah, Mrs. Jones!

(MRS. JONES, MRS. ALMA JONES, *ushered in by* MILLETT, *trips into the room. Of indefinite age, she is rather fussily dressed, and is carrying, clutched to her bosom, a bunch of red roses. Her manner is devastatingly bright.*)

MRS. JONES (*skipping forward to* L.C.). Now, Madame, I know I'm late, but you're not going to be cross and scold me, are you?

MADAME. Mrs. Jones, this is Miss Wisper.

MRS. JONES. How do you do, dear? Wisper? What a sweetly pretty name! (*To* MRS. SMITH.) Good morning, Minnie.

MRS. SMITH. Morning.

MRS. JONES. Of course I know it is naughty of me to be so late; but such a morning, my dears, such a great big smiley sun! and the flowers in the Park! I dropped a curtsy to all the rhododendrons, and lay on the ground to see what the world looks like if one's a harebell—why *won't* Park-keepers understand?—Oh, and right by the Park Gates I found a lovely, cuddly, apple-cheeked old woman, selling roses. (*Pouting.*) She asked a whole shilling for these. (*Brightly.*) But I gave her a shiny silver sixpence, and a great big hug.

MADAME (*with some severity*). I should have thought that upon this, of all mornings, you'd have found sufficient to occupy your mind, without romping in the Park.

MRS. JONES. Oh, but you've no idea how a romp helps me with my work. (*Moving down* R. *and turning.*) Why, I composed my to-morrow's between the Park gates and your front door. It goes like this: "*I always feel that life's worth while, whene'er I see a baby smile, don't you? I always think their curly toes are like the petals of a rose, don't you? And when I*——" But no, I shan't tell

you any more, or it will spoil it for you to-morrow, won't it?

MADAME. I was thinking, rather, of *our* great work.

MRS. JONES (*vaguely*). Our great work? (*Then, recollecting.*) Oh, of course! How silly of me! You mean the Golden-Age-To-Be, don't you? No more men! Do you really think I shall be Poet Laureate? Oh, won't that be lovely, lovely! I shall write the sweetest poems, the sort that will bring sunshine to sad hearts on grey days, and a great big book to prove that all Shakespeare's plays were written by Anne Hathaway. I've got it all planned out. (*Sitting* R. *of the table* C.)

MRS. SMITH (*crudely*). You realize, I suppose, that you've seen that husband of yours for the last time?

MRS. JONES. Yes . . . that made Alma just a little sad.

MRS. SMITH. Ha!

MRS. JONES. But I pept through the banister-rails and called "Cuckoo!" to him, as he was brushing his hat in the hall.

MRS. SMITH. Mine said I was not to worry if he didn't turn up at dinner to-night. I said, "I won't, Henry, I promise you I won't." Ha! ha! What's the time, Emily. (*Rising and moving down* L.C.)

MADAME. Very near. I wish the others would hurry up.

MRS. SMITH. We shan't wait for them, of course.

MRS. JONES. Let's pretend we've done it already, shall we, just to tease them?

MRS. SMITH. Don't be a fool!

MISS WISPER (*suddenly*). Oh, Madame, I've just thought of something.

MADAME. What?

MISS WISPER. Why—if all the men are to be—er—swept away—well—the world will come to an end, won't it?

MRS. SMITH. Eh? What does she say?

MISS WISPER. Well—I mean to say—there won't be any new people born, will there?

MADAME (*complacently*). There will not. But don't you see how infinitely better it is that the world should

enjoy perfection for a comparatively few years, rather than blunder on in imperfection until eternity?

MISS WISPER (*doubtfully*). Yes . . . I see what you mean, I think.

MRS. SMITH. I should hope so.

MRS. JONES. Of course you do, dear. Why, it's all going to be lovely, lovely, lovely.

(*The door bell rings.*)

Listen! I love the tinkly sound of bells, don't you? (*Moving up to the window* C. *and looking out.*)

MADAME. Mrs. Robinson and Mrs. Brown, I hope. Only a few minutes to go now.

(MILLETT *enters from the door* L., *and stands aside as* MRS. ROBINSON *trails into the room. She is about 35, very elegantly dressed and most carefully made-up. Her manner is languid, artificial and faintly exotic; she speaks with an indolent drawl and a slight lisp. She is carrying a bag, and, tucked under her arm, a Pekingese dog.*)

MRS. ROBINSON (*coming forward unhurriedly*). Ah, good morning.

MADAME. This is Miss Wisper, Mrs. Robinson.

MRS. ROBINSON. Oh, yes? How do you do? (*To* MADAME.) I'm so sorry to be late, but I've had a racking morning. Really, I scarcely thought I should be able to come at all. One of my nervous headaches. The most excruciating torture imaginable.

MRS. JONES (*up* L.C.). You poor, poor thing.

MRS. ROBINSON. Simply prostrate. Nobody knows how I suffer. And then, just as we were about to start, Tutu was sick. (*To the dog.*) Weren't you, my precious? (*To* MADAME.) It was twelve o'clock you said, wasn't it? Tell me now, do you really think it's going to work?

MADAME. Work?

MRS. ROBINSON. There won't be any hitch? I couldn't bear it. My nerves are in such a state. The least thing sets them vibrating. (*To the dog.*) No, no, darling, you mustn't play with Mummy's pearls.

MRS. SMITH. There'll be no hitch; oh, dear, no!

MRS. ROBINSON (*in sudden alarm*). There won't be a bang, will there? Don't tell me there's going to be a bang! I couldn't bear it!

MRS. JONES. I shall stuff my fingers in my ears.

MRS. ROBINSON. Anything in the nature of a bang, and I should probably have to lie in a darkened room for weeks.

MADAME. At the most there will be a few seconds of darkness; nothing more.

MRS. ROBINSON (*sinking into the chair* L. *of the table*). I'm so glad! . . . And we're really going to make a clean sweep of them? Men, I mean.

MRS. SMITH (*vigorously*). Good God! What d'you think we're here for?

MRS. ROBINSON (*wincing and shuddering*). My dear, your voice, your voice. If you could know what it does to me! (*To the dog.*) There, there, dearest, it's quite all right.

MRS. SMITH. Pah!

MRS. ROBINSON (*to* MADAME). And life *will* be more tranquil, *won't* it? The strain of coping with the jangle and tangle of existence as it is at present is more than I can be expected to bear a day longer. I assure you I——

MRS. SMITH (*interrupting her—brusquely*). What she really wants to know is—has she seen her husband for the last time? (*To* MRS. ROBINSON.) You have!

MRS. ROBINSON (*with a contented sigh*). Ah! (*Then, as a disturbing thought strikes her.*) But I shan't have to wear black, shall I?

MRS. SMITH. Certainly not!

MRS. ROBINSON (*leaning back—reassured*). I'm so glad: black just kills me stone dead.

MADAME (*consulting her wrist-watch again*). Ladies it's just on time. Mrs. Brown is not with us, but we shall not wait.

MRS. SMITH. I should think not!

MRS. JONES. Oh, I'm so excited. (*Coming down* L.C.)

MADAME. Mrs. Jones, will you please sit down?

(MRS. JONES *sits on chair* L. *of the table.*)

Miss Wisper, I think I should like you to sit over there, by the window.

(*As the* SCENE *has progressed,* MISS WISPER'S *condition has been one of growing bewilderment, not unmixed with apprehension. Now, at the moment when she realizes that things are actually about to happen, a sudden panic seizes her.*)

MISS WISPER (*rising and taking a step towards* MADAME —*unsteadily*). Madame, you're not really going to do it! You can't You can't!

MADAME (*standing up* R.C., *glaring at her—sternly*). What's that? Eh? Eh? (*Authoritatively.*) Get over there, girl, and sit down.

(MISS WISPER *cowers, but does not move.*)

You hear me?

(MISS WISPER *stands her ground for a further second or two; then, quailing beneath* MADAME'S *cold and commanding eye, she retreats submissively to the window and sits on the settee.*)

(*Addressing the others—impressively.*) The hour of the world's deliverance is at hand, ladies! The centuries of unrest are ended! All the years of—— (*Breaking off as, outside in the street, a barrel-organ suddenly starts to grind out a jerky tune.*) Miss Wisper, what is that?

MISS WISPER. I don't know. (*Rising and glancing fearfully out of the window.*) It's a man with a barrel-organ.

MRS. SMITH (*tapping her stick, impatiently*). Open the window and tell him to go away!

MADAME (*quietly—a world of meaning in the words*). There is no need. (*Moving resolutely to the switch in the wall up* R.)

MRS. ROBINSON. Just a moment! Let me make quite sure that I have my drops. (*She fumbles in her bag.*) Ah, yes. (*She leans back and closes her eyes.*) Now.

(MADAME *stretches out her arm and presses the switch. There*

is a sharp click. For a moment nothing happens. MRS JONES, *a half-smile on her lips, blinks her eyes, and holds up a forefinger, expectantly;* MRS. SMITH *folds her arms, coughs portentously, and grimly awaits the manifestation;* MRS. ROBINSON, *with* TUTU *on her lap, is still leaning back, her eyes closed;* MISS WISPER *cowers on the settee, obviously terrified;* MADAME, *standing by the switch, her head held on one side, appears to be listening. . . . The light becomes less brilliant, fades, at first gradually, then swiftly, until the room is in pitch darkness. A sudden rush of wind is heard; the jangling tune of the barrel-organ ceases abruptly; the sound of the wind dies away. Silence. Then the blackness pales; the room grows light once more. . . . The attitudes of the women are unchanged. There is a second's pause, then* MRS. SMITH *unfolds her arms, relaxes, and heaves a long sigh of satisfaction.*)

MRS. SMITH. Ah!

MADAME (*spreading wide her arms*). A world without men!

MRS. SMITH. A world without men!

MRS. JONES (*gazing round about her—wide-eyed*). You can almost sort of feel the difference, can't you?

MRS. ROBINSON (*opening her eyes*). Is it all over?

MADAME (*slowly*). Yes . . . all over.

(*By the window,* MISS WISPER *gives a little half-sobbing cry, and springs to her feet.*)

MISS WISPER (*pointing out of the window*). Look! Look!

MRS. SMITH. What is it?

MISS WISPER (*hysterically*). The barrel-organ's standing there alone! The man's gone! Vanished!

MADAME (*complacently*). Of course he's gone.

MISS WISPER. Then it's true! Oh! (*Collapsing again, and hiding her face in her hands.*)

MRS. JONES (*rising and hurrying to her*). There, there, dear, there's nothing to be afraid of—why, it's all going to be lovely, lovely, lovely, and——

(MRS. JONES'S *ministrations are interrupted by a shrill*

staccato scream from MRS. ROBINSON, *who sits up in her chair and gazes wildly round the room.*)

MADAME. What is it, Mrs. Robinson?

MRS. ROBINSON. Tutu! He's gone! Where is he?

(TUTU *has indeed vanished.*)

MRS. SMITH. Tutu? What are you talking about?

MRS. ROBINSON (*rising and looking under the table*). Oh, where can he be? (*Calling.*) Tutu! Tutu! Where are you, darling? Don't hide! I can see you! (*To the others.*) He was in my lap not a moment ago.

MRS. SMITH. Did you say "he"?

MRS. ROBINSON. I did.

MADAME. Your dog, you mean?

MRS. ROBINSON (*distractedly*). Of course, of course. (*Calling.*) Tutu! Tutu!

MADAME (*calmly*). It isn't the slightest use your calling, Mrs. Robinson.

MRS. ROBINSON. What do you mean?

MADAME. Tutu was a "he", you say. (*Significantly.*) Very well then.

MRS. ROBINSON (*as the dreadful truth flashes upon her*). You don't mean——

MADAME. All male living things, Mrs. Robinson.

MRS. ROBINSON (*agonized*). But not dogs? You never said dogs!

MADAME. Dogs, naturally, were included.

MRS. SMITH. Naturally. Ha!

MRS. ROBINSON (*sinking into her chair* R. *of the table*). Oh, but this is terrible! terrible! I thought you meant just husbands, and things like that. Not dogs! Not my poor Tutu! (*Weeping incoherently.*) Where is he now? I can't bear it! Where is he? I demand that you bring him back to me at once! I demand it! You hear me? At once! At once!

MRS. SMITH (*springing to her feet and banging her stick on the floor*). Will you be quiet!

MRS. ROBINSON (*sobbing and wailing*). Tutu! They've taken you away from me!

MRS. JONES (*fluttering round the table to her* L.). Don't,

dear, don't. You can easily buy another; a nice lady dog.

MRS. ROBINSON (*wildly*). No! No! No!

MRS. SMITH. A good riddance to the long-haired vermin, is what I say.

MRS. ROBINSON. Vermin! Oh!

(*She screams and the next instant a highly spectacular display of hysterics is in full progress. In the midst of the ensuing commotion the door* L. *is flung open and* MRS. BROWN *rushes into the room. She is in the early thirties, but of her general appearance it would at this moment be unfair to judge, for she is breathless with hurrying, her face is flushed, her hat is slightly askew, and she is extremely agitated. The immediate effect of her sudden entry is to cause a suspension in mid-air, so to speak, of the hysterics. The group which has formed round the afflicted lady's chair turns to face the newcomer.*)

MRS. BROWN (*panting and gasping*). Madame! Madame! You—you've missed one!

(*For two or three seconds there is silence. Then.*)

MADAME. Missed one? What do you mean?

MRS. BROWN (*sinking into the armchair which* MRS. SMITH *has just vacated—still breathless*). Just what I say! Oh, dear, I've run all the way from the Park Gates.

MRS. JONES (*hurrying across to her*). You poor dear thing.

MADAME (*advancing—waving* MRS. JONES *to one side*). Will you please explain, Mrs. Brown?

MRS. BROWN. Of course I will, if you'll let me get my breath . . . you see, I was only halfway across the Park when I realized I couldn't be here in time, no matter how I hurried. So I just walked on, taking it quite easily, until I came to the Park Gates. There were quite a lot of men as there always are, some just lounging about, others walking along the road.

MRS. SMITH. Yes, yes, go on!

MRS. BROWN (*still panting for breath*). I'm telling you as quickly as I can. . . . I'd no sooner reached the gates than *it—it* began to happen. You know what I

mean. The first thing I noticed was that it seemed to be growing darker. The next minute it was pitch black. Of course, I knew what was going on, so I tried not to be frightened. All the same, it seemed a long time before it came light again; and when it did, I looked round, and all the men——

MRS. SMITH. Had vanished!

MRS. BROWN. Except one!

MADAME.
MRS. SMITH. } What?
MRS. JONES.

MRS. BROWN. All except one, Madame, and he was standing quite close to me, staring about him, as though he couldn't realize what had happened.

MADAME. Nonsense! You must have imagined him!

MRS. BROWN. Oh, no, I did not.

MADAME. You really mean——?

MRS. BROWN. I do.

MRS. SMITH. Impossible!

MADAME (*with a gesture to her to be silent*). Please. (*To* MRS. BROWN.) You don't think you could possibly have been mistaken?

MRS. BROWN. I was not mistaken: he was there, as large as life.

(*There is a short pause—all look at each other.*)

MRS. SMITH (*heavily*). Then we've failed!

MADAME (*sharply*). We've done nothing of the sort. (*Refusing to be daunted.*) In all scientific experiments there is always the *n*th chance. That is what has happened in this case. This man has escaped by the *n*th chance. An irritating circumstance, but certainly not failure. In any case, what's one man in a world of women?

MRS. SMITH. It all depends upon the man. (*Anxiously to* MRS. BROWN.) Did you happen to notice the colour of his suit?

MRS. BROWN. A sort of grey, I think.

MRS. SMITH (*very pleased*). Good! Henry was wearing brown.

MRS. JONES (*anxiously*). He didn't look like the sort of man who might want to be Poet Laureate, did he?

MRS. BROWN. I shouldn't think he was that type.

MRS. JONES (*relieved*). Ah!

MRS. SMITH. Did you notice what happened to him, which way he went?

MRS. BROWN. Yes, I did. After staring about him in a stunned sort of way, he suddenly dashed across the road, and through the swing-door of the Adonis Cocktail Bar.

MRS. SMITH. Ah! Feeling more surprised than ever before in his life. (*Hopefully.*) He may even die of the shock when he learns the true state of things.

MADAME. Our most sensible course is to put him clean out of our minds. As I say, what's one man? He can scarcely count in the new scheme of life. The whole thing is unfortunate: just that, and nothing more.

MRS. SMITH. That's how we must regard it.

MRS. ROBINSON (*thoughtfully*). Dashed across the road, I think you said. Not an old man, then?

MRS. BROWN. Oh, no; quite young, I should say.

MRS. ROBINSON. Just—er—just an ordinary sort of person?

MRS. BROWN. He struck me as rather distinguished-looking, if you know what I mean, and distinctly handsome, with fair, curly hair.

MRS. SMITH (*severely*). You appear to have taken a good deal of notice of him.

MRS. BROWN. Naturally, under the circumstances, I did.

MRS. ROBINSON. He sounds most . . .

MRS. SMITH (*sharply*). What?

MRS. ROBINSON. Oh—nothing.

MADAME (*protesting*). Ladies! Ladies! What does it matter what he looks like, or whether he's young or old, this one solitary man who's left upon the earth, when all the others of his kind have been swept away? He doesn't count! How could he? Haven't we women gathered here in this room, in such an hour, the

greatest the world has ever known, haven't we other matters to engage our attention, to discuss?

MRS. SMITH. Of course we have. In any case, he probably won't survive for long. Why, you've only got to remember that every single motor-car that moves will be driven by a woman—and he seems rather given to dashing across the street. We can forget him.

MADAME. I should hope so indeed. (*Briskly.*) Well, now, first of all there's the question of——

(*She breaks off as* MRS. ROBINSON *rises hastily from her chair.*)

MRS. ROBINSON. I'm sorry, but I'm afraid you'll have to excuse me. It's all been too much for me—Tutu—my nerves—vibrating—I must go home at once—at once.

MADAME. But——

MRS. ROBINSON (*hurrying to the door* L.). No, no, really, it's most kind of you, but I simply must not stay. Must not. I'm sure you will arrange everything quite beautifully. (*By the door, her hand on the handle.*) And we can consider it all a great success, can't we? . . . . After all, one man can't really matter, can he? . . . The Adonis Cocktail Bar, I think you said—— Yes, yes, of course.

(MRS. ROBINSON *hurries out,* L., *closing the door behind her. The remaining women, stunned by this sudden departure, are speechless for a moment, their heads turned towards the door. Then* MADAME, *the first to recover herself, shrugs her shoulders, and, with a business-like air, sits in the chair at the back of the table.*)

MADAME. Well, well—— First of all, as I was about to say, there is the question of the Press. (*Half turning in her chair and addressing* MISS WISPER, *who is still seated, pale and shaken, by the window.*) Miss Wisper, this is a matter in which I think you can help.

MISS WISPER (*starting—rising*). Madame, I——

MADAME. If you would come and sit over here.

(MISS WISPER *comes down and sits* R. *of the table*, MRS. JONES *sits* L. *of the table, in the chair recently vacated by* MRS. ROBINSON; MRS. SMITH *stands* L. *of* MADAME, *who sits* C. *above the table.*)

Thank you. . . . Now, as to the Press, it is almost certain that at first there may be something in the nature of a mild panic among the women by whom the earth is now populated. The events of to-day will have been so overwhelming, that they may not immediately realize their good fortune. They must be reassured. That is where we shall make use of the Press. Have you any suggestions, Miss Wisper?

MISS WISPER. Well—perhaps my editor——

MADAME (*bluntly*). Your editor no long inhabits the earth!

MISS WISPER (*weakly*). Oh—I——

MADAME. Mrs. Smith?

MRS. SMITH. Cram as much as you can into the headlines, that's what I say!

MADAME (*leaning back in her chair*). The headlines . . . yes. Let me see, now. . . . You, Mrs. Jones, have you any ideas as to a suitable headline?

MRS. JONES (*who has been paying no attention—gazing unseeingly in front of her*). Fair, curly hair.

MADAME. I beg your pardon.

MRS. JONES (*dreamily*). George was middle-aged, and he'd worn a toupée for years.

MRS. BROWN. What?

MRS. SMITH (*rapping her stick on the floor*). Mrs. Jones!

MRS. JONES (*starting—confused*). I—oh—I was just thinking about poor dear Mrs. Robinson. Surely one of us ought to have gone with her. Supposing she's taken ill on the way home!

MRS. SMITH. Rubbish!

MRS. JONES. But we should never forgive ourselves, never. (*Rising and hurrying to the door* R.) No, no, don't worry, I'll go myself. I shall overtake her quite easily if I run.

MADAME. But the headlines!

MRS. JONES. Yes, yes, my dear, some other time, some other time.

(MRS. JONES *flutters from the room and is gone. Once again there is a short silence, broken this time by* MRS. BROWN, *who suddenly and very deliberately rises from her chair.*)

MRS. BROWN. Ha! So that's what it is!

MADAME. What what is, Mrs. Brown?

MRS. BROWN (*facing the others*). Oh, don't pretend you don't know why those two have left in such a hurry! I might have known how it would be! I might have known! Ha!

MADAME. I haven't the least idea what you are talking about.

MRS. SMITH. Sit down and try to control yourself.

MRS. BROWN. No, Mrs. Smith, I will *not* sit down! (*Swinging round and marching to the door* L., *turning at the door defiantly.*) In any case, *I* saw him first!

(MRS. BROWN *goes out, slamming the door.*)

MADAME (*rising—calling after her*). Mrs. Brown!

MRS. SMITH. It's no use: she's gone.

(*There is a pause.*)

MADAME. Really, I must say I think their behaviour a little unreasonable—rushing off like this. . . . Can it be the—er—the reaction, do you suppose?

MRS. SMITH. That's just what it is, Emily: they're reacting to the *n*th chance.

MADAME. The *n*th chance?

MRS. SMITH. Distinguished-looking, handsome, and with fair, curly hair.

MADAME (*aghast at the thought*). You—you don't mean to say——?

MRS. SMITH. Didn't you hear what she said? She saw him first? What do you imagine she meant by that, eh?

MADAME (*after a pause—stunned*). But it isn't true! It couldn't be! Not of those women—after the way

they've flung themselves heart and soul into our one great ideal.

MRS. SMITH (*dryly*). During the past ten minutes they've found another ideal to fling themselves heart and soul into, that's all.

MADAME. I don't believe it! You've no right to make such insinuations! I'm surprised at you, Minnie! (*Turning to* MISS WISPER.) You—you don't think that what she says is true, do you?

MISS WISPER (*who has recovered her courage somewhat*). Yes, Madame Pavel, I do.

MADAME, No! No!

MRS. SMITH. She knows it's true: she isn't a fool.

MADAME (*in a tone which suggests she is trying to convince herself as much as her listeners*). You're wrong, both of you, quite wrong. I should be ashamed to harbour such unworthy thoughts, if I were you. Myself, I have no doubt whatever that Mrs. Robinson *was* feeling the strain—after all, she was very attached to that dog.

MRS. SMITH. Vermin!

MADAME. I've no doubt that Mrs. Jones *did* feel impelled to go after her to see that she came to no harm. Alma is a big-hearted woman.

MRS. SMITH (*sarcastically*). I know. You can read all about that great big heart of hers any day in her Perfumed Paragraph. It's as good as an emetic to me.

MADAME. And as for Mrs. Brown—well—— (*She pauses.*)

MRS. SMITH (*maliciously*). As for Mrs. Brown? The woman who saw him first? Yes? Go on, Emily, I'm listening.

MADAME (*lamely*). She—oh, she was just joking, that's all.

MRS. SMITH. Little tease, isn't she? Shall we sit down and have a good laugh?

MADAME. We shall do nothing of the sort. (*Decisively.*) There are these matters still to be attended to. As the others have. . . . Well, anyhow, we shall have to see to them ourselves. Now, as to the——

MRS. SMITH. Yourself, you mean.

MADAME (*sharply*). What?

MRS. SMITH. I dare say Miss Wisper will help you.

MADAME. But——

MRS. SMITH. I'm going!

MADAME (*rising*). You? Minnie, this is too much! I'll not submit to it! You shall not go! I forbid you!

MRS. SMITH (*amused*). Forbid me! Ha!

MADAME. Yes, I do! You *shan't* desert me! I won't have it! You hear me? I won't have it!

MRS. SMITH (*firmly*). I'm going, and it isn't any use your trying to prevent me.

MADAME. But——

MRS. SMITH (*not allowing her to speak*). Not the slightest use! All my life I've made it my business to be in the front rank of any promising new movement that might crop up. (*With a wave of the hand towards the window.*) I don't propose to lag behind in this one. (*Going to the door.*) Good-bye!

MADAME (*hurrying after her*). Will you please listen to me!

MRS. SMITH. I haven't time. Write it, Emily, write it.

MADAME. Wait! Minnie! Wait!

(*But the door has closed behind* MRS. SMITH, *and she is gone. There is a short pause, then.*)

(*Squaring her shoulders—defiantly.*) Very well, then, let her go! Let them all go! I don't care! I've achieved what I set out to achieve, and that's all that matters. As for those three women—I'll not give them another thought. I've plenty of other things to think about, haven't I? (*Coming down again to the back of the table.*) All the same, I'd never have believed that Minnie could have behaved like that. The other two, perhaps—but Minnie—— And after the way we've worked and planned and schemed together. Shallow, that's what she is, shallow. Shown herself in her true colours at last. That woman can evidently say more and mean less than any other person I ever met.

MISS WISPER. She's a Member of Parliament, isn't she?

MADAME (*ignoring this*). As for the one male creature

who's escaped extermination, I'd like to—— (*Breaking off and giving a little gasp, as though struck by a sudden idea.*) Oh, but what a fool I've been! What a complete and utter fool!

MISS WISPER (*rising*). Why, Madame, what is it?

MADAME (*bursting into loud hysterical laughter*). All the stupid fuss they've made about him! As if he mattered one scrap! I must have been mad not to have thought of this before, stark, staring mad!

MISS WISPER. Madame——

MADAME (*exultantly*). The Force! The Force!

MISS WISPER. Force?

MADAME. The *n*th chance! The billionth chance! He's escaped by it this once, but could he a second time? Never! Never! Never! Oh, how could I have been so dense, with the means here at my hand all the time? (*Going up* R. *rapidly to the switch.*)

MISS WISPER. What are you going to do?

MADAME. What I ought to have done the moment I heard that one still remained—I'm going to press this switch and send out another wave.

MISS WISPER. No, no, you shan't!

MADAME. What's that? You, too?

MISS WISPER. Oh, please, please don't do it!

MADAME (*with her hand on the switch*). Be silent!

MISS WISPER. Madame, I beg you! I implore you!

MADAME. Implore me! (*As* MISS WISPER *takes a step towards her.*) Stand back, I tell you!

(*She presses the switch.* MISS WISPER, *with a little cry, steps back and collapses helplessly into the chair* R. *of the table. As before, the light fades rapidly, in a few seconds the room is in pitch darkness, and once again the wind is heard. Then, after a very short interval, the darkness pales, the sunlight, streaming through the net curtains, grows brighter and brighter.*

MADAME PAVEL *has disappeared. The sole occupant of the room is* MISS WISPER, *who is still seated, her head lolling forward, her eyes closed. The room is very still: there is no sound whatever. Then the door* R. *opens, and*

MADAME PAVEL *re-enters. A* MADAME PAVEL, *however, who is wearing not the plain and severe-looking white overall in which she has previously appeared, but a pretty, entirely feminine frock, and a charming hat. Catching sight of* MISS WISPER, *she pauses in the doorway, then comes into the room and stands by the side of the latter's chair.*)

Good morning.

(*As* MISS WISPER, *her head still lolling forward, makes no response, does not stir,* MADAME *touches her lightly on the shoulder. With a convulsive start and a little gasping cry of fear the girl jerks upright in her chair, then springs to her feet.*)

MISS WISPER (*the back of her hand pressed over her mouth*). You! You! Oh!

MADAME (*somewhat nonplussed*). I—I'm afraid I startled you. I'm Madame Pavel.

(*She smiles reassuringly, and* MISS WISPER, *her expression changing from terror to bewilderment, sinks back into her chair.*)

MISS WISPER (*gazing round her*). But—I—oh, what does it all mean?

MADAME. I think I can tell you: you've been asleep and dreaming, and I startled you.

MISS WISPER. Dreaming! . . . Yes . . . that must be it. (*Confused.*) How stupid you must think me, Madame Pavel.

MADAME. No, no. It's all my fault for keeping you waiting so long. You must forgive me.

MISS WISPER (*with a happy sigh*). Oh, but it's so lovely to know that none of it really happened.

MADAME (*soothingly*). I know, I know: I have bad dreams, too, sometimes. (*She moves round to* R. *of the table.*) You're from the *Daily Wire*, aren't you?

MISS WISPER. Yes. My editor sent me to——

MADAME. Yes, I know. I asked him to send you. I have a communication to make to the Press.

MISS WISPER (*sitting up and assuming the brisk manner of her profession*). Yes, Madame, certainly.

MADAME (*sitting* L. *of the table*). Or, rather, an announcement.

MISS WISPER (*taking her notebook and pencil from her bag*). Quite so.

MADAME. While you have been sitting here having your bad dream, I've been realizing a very happy one: I've been getting married.

MISS WISPER. Married?

MADAME. An hour ago, at the New Street Registry Office. It's all been a tremendous secret: no one has even suspected that we were engaged, my husband and I.

MISS WISPER (*her journalistic instincts thoroughly roused*). Oh, but this is a marvellous scoop!

MADAME. Scoop?

MISS WISPER (*seeing the headlines*). The Greatest Woman Scientist in the World Married To-day! We shall have it in the evening edition, of course. The public will be thrilled. You'll let me have some details, won't you, for the write-up?

MADAME. Write-up?

MISS WISPER. Your husband's name, for one thing.

MADAME. Oh, of course, how silly of me. Captain Anthony Hilton.

MISS WISPER. H—i—l—t—o—n?

MADAME. Yes. . . . I'm afraid he's very little known in England. He only came back six months ago from India where he's lived nearly all his life.

MISS WISPER. Then it would be interesting to our readers if you could tell me something about him. Naturally, they'll be curious.

MADAME. Something about him . . . yes . . . well. . . .

MISS WISPER (*encouragingly*). His—his appearance, for instance.

MADAME (*gazing raptly in front of her*). Oh . . . he's very distinguished-looking . . . handsome . . . and (*dwelling lovingly upon each word*) with fair, curly hair.

The pencil and notebook drop from MISS WISPER'S *fingers to the floor, and*

the CURTAIN *falls.*

PHILIP JOHNSON

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